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# THE SOCIAL USE OF KINSHIP TERMS AMONG BRAZILIAN INDIANS

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121 607 THE kinship system of the Nambikuara Indians of the Western Matto Grosso is one of the most simple in Brazil. At the same time it is typical of a sociological pattern, cross cousin marriage, which according to our present information seems to have been very common throughout South America. The object of this article is to compare the familial organization of the Nambikuara with that of other tribes described in the older literature and to show that a certain kinship tie, the brother-in-law relationship, once possessed a meaning among many South American tribes far transcending a simple expression of relationship. This significance, still observable in Nambikuara culture, is both sexual and politico-social; and, owing to its complexity, the brother-in-law relationship may perhaps be regarded as an actual institution. Since the sixteenth century travellers and sociologists have failed to devote sufficient attention to the phenomenon, probably because it could readily be interpreted as a development of the imported Iberian *compadre* relationship. In our opinion, on the contrary, the brother-in-law relationship, together with its remarkable implications, constitutes an indigenous aboriginal institution based on the pattern of native culture. Nevertheless, it presents a striking example of convergence in which the native and Latin-Mediterranean institutions show numerous apparent similarities overlying important structural differences.

131 133 The Nambikuara Indians are settled on the upper courses of the feeders of the Tapajoz River, between the eleventh and the fifteenth parallels. Their territory consists of a semi-desert savanna, which contrasts with the narrow gallery forests along the main waterways. The fertile soil of these forests allows [511] the natives to cultivate a few gardens in the rainy season, but during most of the year the Nambikuara subsist mainly by hunting and gathering wild food. 177 Compared to the majority of Brazilian tribes, their cultural level is low. As they were discovered only in 1907 and as they had practically no contact with white civilization between the year of the Rondon-Roosevelt Expedition in 1914 and the time of our own field work in 1938–39, their familial and social organization may be considered still intact.

601 The Nambikuara kinship system may be summarized as follows: All the father's brothers are classified together with the father and are called "father," and all the mother's sisters are classified with the mother and are called "mother." The father's sisters and the mother's brothers are classified together with the spouse's parents and the parents' parents in a single category which denotes simultaneously the cross aunts and cross uncles, the mother-in-law and father-in-law, and the grandparents. Passing to Ego's generation, the parallel cousins, both the children of the father's brothers and of the mother's sisters, are merged with siblings and are called "brother" and "sister," Turn-